

FACT VS. FICTION:
LEADVILLE, COLORADO, AS A SETTING FOR FICTION

by

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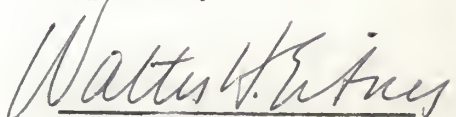
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Historic Leadville

In 1859, gold was discovered near Pikes Peak and, until the closing of the frontier thirty years later, Colorado swarmed with men determined to find their fortunes in the rugged mountains. Towns appeared and disappeared so rapidly that many left no history at all. Some like Colorado Springs grew into major cities. Others like Aspen and Central City hung on until they became tourist attractions. Naturally curious, because of financial investment or love of adventure, Eastern readers were avid for news of these western towns so unlike their own quiet streets settled for two hundred years, and the fame of the wildest towns grew. The most famous was Leadville.

In 1878, Leadville was officially organized as a city; Slabtown and the small cluster of buildings around Charles Mater's general store formed the nucleus. Other names such as California Gulch, Stringtown, Stumptown and Oro City faded. In 1860 and 1861, the richest gold placer diggings in Colorado had been found in California Gulch, but the strike was short-lived and most of the population deserted the barren plateau for more promising gold fields.¹ Always in Colorado there were reports that in the camp "just over the hill" they were bringing in so much gold that everything in sight was filled with the metal. That tale could empty a camp faster than a summer blizzard. But one old die-hard, William H. ("Uncle Billy") Stevens and his partner, Alvinus B. Wood, were curious about the heavy black sand that had discouraged the gold seekers. Their curiosity paid off in 1875 when they found a surface

¹ George E. Willison, Here They Dug the Gold, (London, 1950), p. 139.

vein of silver. This caused little excitement since most men were still looking for gold, but after they sold their claim for \$40,000, interest heightened.² In 1878, Leadville had a population of three hundred. By October, 1879, there were 12,000.³ New strikes came fast; Leadville boomed. Soon it was the largest producer of silver bullion in the world.⁴ Leaders in the state realized the importance of this isolated mining town in the state's economy. The same year that the town was incorporated, its mayor, H. A. W. Tabor, was nominated by the Republican party for lieutenant-governor.

But Leadville's glory was short-lived. The population peak was reached in 1880 when 30,000 people were living in everything from elegant mansions to packing boxes.⁵ But the large mines were playing out, labor unrest caused hard feelings, and unchecked prosperity with its attending inflation was telling on the town. Although the peak of production was still to come in 1882 when the mines produced over \$17,000,000 in bullion, the boom camp was on the decline.⁶ In the late 1880's, gold was found under the "dust" of the first silver workings and the city boomed briefly again. But mining didn't pay. Even in the height of the boom, more money was put into the

² Willison, p. 153.

³ Eugene F. Irely, "A Social History of Leadville, Colorado, During the Boom Days, 1877-1881," (University of Minnesota, 1951), p. 17.

⁴ Willison, p. 160.

⁵ Caroline Bancroft, Tabor's Matchless Mine and Lusty Leadville, (Boulder, Colorado, 1964), p. 18. She estimates Leadville's stable population at 20,000 in 1880, discounting drifters and people living outside the city limits.

⁶ Willison, p. 241.

ground around Leadville than was ever taken out.⁷ Today, Leadville's biggest distinction is that it is the highest city in the United States (10,152'). The 4,000 inhabitants enjoy the massive mountains that rim the valley, including Colorado's highest peak, Mount Elbert.⁸

In its day, Leadville was second only to Denver in population.⁹ The wealthy Leadville citizens named a slight rise in the town "Capitol Hill" and contested Denver's claim as the seat of the state's government. But Leadville was isolated, surrounded by Colorado's tallest mountains, accessible, until the railroad arrived, only over a steep one-way trail, and when men did begin to arrive in the mushrooming city, they weren't the solid citizens a capital city needs. In 1879, the Leadville Chronicle described the "Magic City":

Leadville never sleeps. The theatres close at three in the morning. The dance houses and liquoring shops are never shut. The highwayman patrols the street in quest of drunken prey. The policeman treads his beat to and fro. The music at the beer halls is grinding low. A party of carousers is reeling through the streets. A mail coach has just arrived. There is a merry party opposite the public school. A sick man is groaning in the agonies of death. Carbonate Hill with her scores of brightly blazing fires is Argus-eyed. Three shots are heard down below the old court house. A woman screams. There is a fight in a State Street casino. The sky is cloudless. A man stands dreaming in front of the Windsor looking at the stars-- he is away from home. A barouche holding two men and two women comes rushing up Chestnut Street. Another shot is heard down near the city jail. A big forest fire lights up the mountains at the head of Iowa Gulch.¹⁰

⁷ Willison, p. 283.

⁸ Rand McNally Cosmopolitan World Atlas, (New York, 1964), p. 204

⁹ Bancroft, p. 17.

¹⁰ Willison, p. 166. Irey quotes a similar passage from the Democrat, July 27, 1880, that laments the calmer atmosphere. "Now one can stand on a street corner twenty minutes without hearing the whiz of a single bullet. Alas! Alas!" p. 137.

Leadville was home for all kinds of men--gamblers, teamsters, smelter-hands, engineers, lawyers, temperance lecturers and quacks. Only Indians and Chinese were excluded.¹¹

To attempt to control this varied population, Mayor H. A. W. Tabor appointed Mart Duggan city marshall, "a man in the famous tradition of the old west, posing as absolutely fearless and carrying a notched gun prominently displayed."¹² He was a bully and a killer and did his job by terrorizing the town, yet he held his job many years. But even this could not completely control the town's lawless element. One hundred twenty saloons kept their doors open every day of the week, brothels operated openly, gambling ranged from the nutshell game, where men tried to guess which nutshell hid the pea, to faro which brought in \$1,000 monthly to the average gambling bank. One night, in one hour of play, the Carbonate Kings, society's elite, won from the Texas House over \$30,000.¹³ Yet, when an attempt was made to stamp out gambling and prostitution, the city fathers found the lack of income from fines would seriously hamper city government.¹⁴

Unchecked revelry was not the only problem in Leadville. "Every sort of melodramatic event occurred in such quick succession that the usual TV serial would be shamed," says Miss Bancroft.¹⁵ The height of the boom attracted the hardened ruffians who followed Colorado's rapidly shifting

¹¹ Ireys, pp. 34-35.

¹² Ireys, p. 240.

¹³ Willison, p. 203. Ireys found that in 1880 ten faro games capitalized at \$100,000 and three hundred men supported themselves from gambling. p. 123.

¹⁴ Ireys, p. 125.

¹⁵ Bancroft, p. 16.

prosperity like vultures, taking all they could in the confusion of a town grown too large too fast. After bread riots in March of 1879, the Governor wrote to Tabor suggesting the formation of military companies. Tabor did so in his usual grand manner, outfitting the "Highland Guards" in elaborate costumes. Other Carbonate kings followed suit and, in effect, each formed a small private army.¹⁶ Yet murders, lot-jumping and mine-jumping continued unchecked. Pick-pockets roamed the streets and two attempts were even made to burn the town and plunder it in the ensuing confusion.¹⁷ The police force itself was riddled with lazy and dishonest men. In the latter part of 1879, Jesse James appeared in California Gulch and the people became frightened enough that they began to turn to lynching as a means to bring justice, since the courts had failed to convict any murderers. In November, the "Gentlemen Vigs" lynched a friendless victim of circumstances and pinned to his back a list of undesirables who were instructed to get out of town. Fear of reprisal from the outlaws kept the town calm for several weeks, but the problem was not solved. In October of 1880 the homicide rate for the little city of Leadville was ten times greater than that of Chicago in 1929.¹⁸

As if this were not enough, the labor unrest reached Leadville in 1879. Men died of lead poisoning and pneumonia contracted during long hours in damp, unventilated mines. In May of 1880, the miners quit working and the mines quit operating. Miners were orderly, but the mine owners wouldn't compromise. Martial law was finally declared and David Cook, Major General of

¹⁶ Willison, p. 223.

¹⁷ Willison, pp. 225-226.

¹⁸ Willison, p. 234. Ireys supports this account of lynching, p. 83.

Militia in Colorado arrived and got matters under control. The miners returned to work, none of their demands met. The public was still against the working man. The strike did, however, reveal that Leadville's boom was near an end. Mine owners were moving from Leadville and the mines had been borrowing money to pay excessive dividends. When this was discovered, stocks fell.¹⁹

In the earliest days, the mines themselves were the scenes of lawlessness. For a claim to be official, the claimant had to have it surveyed and recorded. As long as the discovery shaft was in the middle, the boundary lines could go any direction. Other shafts within those lines went to the man who filed the first survey. Poor miners who had to work in other mines to keep alive lost out to those who had enough wealth to work fast. Claim jumping was a common practice, when men took by force the workings of another miner. Another method of stealing went on underground. In one case, two miners, Stevens and Leiter, were working a promising vein on a slant from their tunnel when another man, Williams, drove a shaft straight down and intercepted the tunnel. He erected a barricade and manned it with armed guards. Stevens and Leiter attacked with a large force, routed the invaders, but not without the loss of life on both sides.²⁰ The law had been ineffective again. The poorer miners formed the Miners' Mutual Protective Association in self-defense.²¹

¹⁹ Willison, p. 241. Irey discusses in detail the strike's causes and results, pp. 103-113.

²⁰ Willison, pp. 161-162. Bancroft reports the use of sulphur smoke in underground battles, p. 14.

²¹ Willison, p. 162.

Amidst all this confusion, great fortunes were made and attracted to the town wealthy and famous people. Two large hotels provided the best in rooms, food and entertainment. The Grand was operated by Thomas F. Walsh and the Clarendon by William H. Bush for Tabor. The chef at the Clarendon was A. Lapierce from Delmonico's, New York. Private dancing clubs flourished, with the Assembly Club being the most fashionable. The wealthy men belonged to the Clarendon Club, the Leadville Club or the Apollo Club. For "intellectuals," there was the Leadville Literary Society, the Everett Glee Club and the Bel Esprit Society. Church societies and temperance clubs struggled for effective recognition. The various wine theatres attracted their customers with drinks and variety attractions. The Grand Central, which the Carbonate Kings attended, offered such varied attractions as Around the World in Eighty Days and Nana, the Lovely Blonde. The Tabor Opera House opened with a comedy and a farce, produced mostly melodrama, and in March of 1880 offered, on the same bill, Othello and The Artful Dodger. The bill lasted only two nights.²² In 1882 Oscar Wilde visited the town. He lectured on "The Practical Application of the Aesthetic Theory to Exterior and Interior House Decoration, with Observations on Dress and Personal Ornament."²³ After the lecture, Tabor took Wilde and his manager into the Matchless Mine. Dressed in a slouch hat, corduroy coat, low shoes and tight pants, with an underground suit of India rubber over it all, Wilde was voted a perfect gentleman by the miners after he drank his underground dinner of whisky--three courses. Of Leadville, Wilde later recollected, "Nearly

²² Willison, p. 213. Ireys lists all the theatrical productions 1878-1881 in an appendix.

²³ Willison, p. 216.

every man carried a revolver, I was told they would be sure to shoot me or my traveling manager. I wrote and told them that nothing they could do to my traveling manager would intimidate me."²⁴ Above ground, Wilde toured Pap Wyman's, the towns' largest saloon, in his velvet coat and silk stockings.

Perhaps the thing that fascinated people most about Leadville was the apparent ease with which fortunes were won and lost. Certainly this town can boast the most colorful stories of the Colorado mining boom. Once the silver proved its value, finds brought in unheard-of profits. Four Irishmen struck the Little Chief. One sold out immediately for \$2,000. Another was bought out for \$30,000 and within a year the last two sold their share for \$400,000.²⁵ An equal story for hard luck is that of Jim Dexter who worked months on the Robert E. Lee to no avail. He accepted an offer of \$30,000 so fast that he ordered his men to the surface before they set off the charge they had just laid. The next morning the new owners set off the charge and uncovered a vein of almost pure silver. Later, the mine in one twenty-four hour period produced ninety-five tons of ore worth \$118,500 at a total labor cost of \$60.²⁶ Jim Dexter never got to share that wealth he could have uncovered with just one more blast.

The greatest story of the Leadville silver boom is Horace A. W. Tabor's. When silver was discovered in Leadville, Tabor was too disillusioned to rush out with the few others who had stayed in the dying gold boom town to dig frantically for silver. He and his wife Augusta kept a general store and took in boarders. But fortune would not leave Tabor alone. In May, George Hook and August Rische asked Tabor for a grubstake, in return for the standard

²⁴ Bancroft, pp. 4-5.

²⁵ Willison, p. 155.

²⁶ Ireys, p. 120.

one-third interest in whatever they found. Within a week they had struck the Little Pittsburgh mine. By July each partner had an income of fifty thousand per month. Hook sold out for \$98,000 and later Rische sold this interest and some others for over \$250,000.²⁷ Tabor and other investors organized a stock-selling concern that capitalized at twenty million dollars.

One of the favorite stories told about Tabor's mining interests concerns a rascal named Chicken Bill Lovell, who became discouraged when his shaft, the Chrysolite, filled with water. He "salted" his claim with ore taken from the dump of Tabor's own Pittsburgh, then approached Tabor, who bought the mine on the spot, for \$40,000 according to Willison (\$900 according to Bancroft). When the swindle was discovered, Tabor ignored the ridiculous situation he was in, ordered his men to keep working the mine, and ten feet further down struck a vein that brought in dividends of over \$100,000 a month for more than two years.²⁸

Tabor's wealth alone would probably not have brought him such fame. True, he was a leading figure in the town, the first mayor, and the state's lieutenant governor. He tried for the senate in 1882. He was a reckless gambler and frequented the town's best saloons. He even read at the Bel Esprit literary society. These activities made him the most famous man in

²⁷ Caroline Bancroft, Silver Queen; the Fabulous Story of Baby Doe Tabor, (Boulder, Colorado, 1962), p. 30. Willison estimates Hook's sale at \$100,000 and Rische's at \$265,000 with \$145,000 already earned in dividends, p. 158.

²⁸ Willison, p. 159. Bancroft says a total of three million, Silver Queen, p. 40.

Leadville and certainly one of the most talked about men in Denver, where he bought a home for \$40,000.²⁹ But even these feats would make him only one of the many who built a fortune in Colorado. It is his scandalous love affair with Baby Doe that made him Leadville's best remembered figure.

Baby Doe, separated from her wealthy but shiftless husband Harvey Doe, came to Leadville in 1879. One evening in the Saddle Rock Cafe Tabor saw her and a love affair started that lasted fifty-five years. He was married to unbending Augusta, a stern New Englander who had shared many hard years with him and found it hard to realize their sudden wealth. Baby Doe, whose real name was Elizabeth McCourt Doe, was an Irish Catholic and her husband Harvey had not yet granted her a divorce, although he had abandoned her. Tabor had Baby Doe live in the Clarendon hotel, close to his office in the Opera House while he attempted to separate from Augusta. Tabor and Baby Doe moved to Denver where most of Tabor's business was centered. Finally, Augusta granted a divorce and Baby Doe was free from Harvey. Tabor and Baby Doe were married in Washington, D. C., while Tabor was serving out thirty days of an unexpired senate term. President Arthur and other government officials attended but their wives were conspicuously absent. The new Mrs. Tabor's wedding gown cost \$7,000 but she did not wear Tabor's wedding gift, a \$75,000 diamond necklace which was not finished in time for the ceremony. For ten years they enjoyed prosperity. Baby Doe became a mother. But Denver society ignored her and the mines began to fall off. Final ruin came with the Panic of 1893 that wiped out many fortunes. None of the people Tabor had so generously helped through the years returned the aid when his empire tumbled. A political friend managed to get Tabor appointed postmaster of Denver

²⁹ Willison, p. 165.

and the \$3,500 salary was their only income for a year. Then in 1899 Tabor had an attack of appendicitis and after seven days, he died. His dying words were, "Never let the Matchless go." Baby Doe Tabor never did. Her children drifted from her and she returned to Leadville to live in the shaft house of the Matchless Mine, fighting off mortgage closing, accepting donations through fan mail from people who read newspaper accounts of her fight or had seen the exaggerated movie, "Silver Dollar." In the summer, tourists flocked around her mine. The last day she was seen alive was February 20, 1933. Two weeks later, a neighbor noticed that no smoke had come from the chimney of her shack for three days and went to investigate. She found Baby Doe Tabor frozen and emaciated--dead. Today the Matchless Mine is still one of the main tourist attractions of Leadville.

Another famous Leadville figure was Mrs. Margaret Tobin Brown who rose to national prominence as a heroine on the Titanic. She is the leading figure in Meredith Willson's musical, The Unsinkable Molly Brown. She arrived in Leadville from Missouri in 1883, after the peak of the silver boom. In 1886 she married the persistent manager of the Louisville mine, James J. Brown, and they lived in Stumptown, three miles east of Leadville. Maggie Brown hungered for wealth. She was never one to under-rate her experiences, so many tales grew up concerning her rise to wealth, including the story about the money Jim hid in the stove and she burned. Caroline Bancroft points out no paper money was even used in Colorado before World War I.³⁰ Actually, the sum was \$75 in silver that was recovered when the ashes cooled. But Jim was a good superintendent and when he discovered gold (not silver)

³⁰ Caroline Bancroft, The Unsinkable Mrs. Brown, (Boulder, Colorado, 1963), p. 9. Information on Mrs. Brown taken from this source unless otherwise cited.

the mine's owners gave him one-eighth interest in the mine. Mrs. Brown made the most of this new wealth although it never amounted to more than one or two million, less than any other Colorado millionaire of the period. The Browns moved to Denver and she set out to conquer Denver society. She dressed lavishly, took every conceivable kind of culture-enrichment course and tried to be active in the society charities. But no society is more particular than one that knows only too well how shaky its own background is. Maggie found no more friends than scandalous Baby Doe did. Her husband, active in real estate and mining, traveled a great deal and had no use for Maggie's efforts in society. He drank and they frequently quarrelled. When he returned from one trip to find a camp of Cheyenne Indians on their lawn, acquired by Maggie for the Catholic Fair, it was too much for Jim and he left Maggie alone for good, although he continued to support her. She traveled to Europe and rented a cottage in Newport near her new friend, one Countess Annie Leary. She was accepted into Newport and New York society where they were delighted by her stories, her wit and her theatrical ways. She fabricated stories to impress her Eastern friends. She called Jim "Leadville Johnny" when in fact an entirely different man was known by that name in Colorado. From one chance meeting with Mark Twain, also a native of Hannibal, Missouri, she fabricated a close family relationship.

After the Titanic sank, Mrs. Brown's boisterous humor and positive action kept control in her lifeboat when panic could have sent them all into the icy sea. Her comments to the press gave her her nickname, the Unsinkable Mrs. Brown. Her simple exploits in the lifeboat grew into legend. When she returned to Denver, society welcomed her. Her unselfish acts of heroism earned her the place her persistent exhibitions never could. But this position did not last, contrary to the rosy endings awarded her on the stage and

screen.³¹ Jim did not come back to her, and her pretentiousness became a disease. When Jim died in 1922, he left no will and Maggie had to struggle with her children for his estate. She still attracted attention in the East, however, and when she died in New York at the age of sixty-five, she was still admired by many and a laughing stock to many more.

This was the real Leadville, a city of strong contrasts. Elegant society struggled for world-wide recognition against a background of uncontrolled lawlessness. This account might seem to be exaggerated if it were not corroborated by so many authorities and if it had not been repeated over and over in other mining camps throughout Colorado -- Cripple Creek, Central City, Aspen, Creede. Men jumped from one boom town to another, getting what they could, leaving behind only piles of dirt dribbling down the hill from a shallow tunnel, and talks of success and failure in yellowing newspapers.

A Survey of Leadville Fiction

A wide range of genres employed this remote city as a setting. The earliest ones were sentimental novels written in the 1880's by Mary Hallock Foote, the wife of a mining engineer who lived for a few years in the city. Her fiction appealed to her Eastern publishers and to many sentimental Eastern readers. She joined a steady stream of women novelists, popular at mid-century -- Harriet Beecher Stowe, Fanny Fern, Elizabeth Weatherwell -- who wrote uncomplicated stories about hearth and home. "They wrote of what they knew--their homes," says James Hart in his study, The Popular Book.³²

³¹ Meredith Willson, The Unsinkable Molly Brown, opened on Broadway, November, 1960, and starred Tammy Grimes as Molly. In the movie, released in 1964, Debbie Reynolds played the lead.

³² James D. Hart, The Popular Book, (Berkeley, California, 1961), p. 91

In her novels, Mary Foote combined the feminine hunger for household sentimentalism with first-hand accounts of the strange and exciting West.

Beadle and Adams, publishers of the popular dime novels, used Leadville as a setting for their stories of adventure. It exemplified in reality the frontier that was the favorite dime novel locale. Albert Johannsen lists fifteen dime novels set in Leadville in his exhaustive study, The House of Beadle and Adams.³³ In the Western History Collection of the Denver Public Library there are eleven additional titles. Of the total output of dime novels, this is a tiny percentage indeed.³⁴ The first Leadville dime novel was Dime Novel #347, Denver Duke, the Man with "Sand"; or, Centipede Sam's Lone Hand published June 17, 1885.

Both the female sentimental tradition and the dime novel tradition are evident in Leadville stories written in the twentieth century. Love stories for the feminine audience are set in Leadville and other Colorado mining towns.³⁵ They have a formula just as the dime novels and sentimental novels did. The heroine struggles against poverty, marries a wealthy man who has struck it rich in the mines, finds life with him unhappy and ends in misery if not in poverty. After reading the stories of Baby Doe Tabor and Maggie Brown, it is impossible not to see shades of direct imitation.

³³ Albert Johannsen, The House of Beadle and Adams... (Norman, Oklahoma, 1951).

³⁴ Johannsen lists 238 set in Colorado, including those set in Leadville. Only Denver has more than Leadville--21.

³⁵ Frank Merchant, "The Theme of Prospecting and Mining Gold and Silver in the American Novel," (Denver University, 1951), lists many mining stories in an appendix.

The "western" emphasizes the crime that was rampant in the mining towns and ignores the mining industry itself. The formula is a familiar one. Justice is hard to come by, the hero is wronged, the heroine is in trouble. Frank Waters has made one attempt to write a Western novel that carefully avoids all the pitfalls of formula writing, but his Colorado trilogy falls short of its goal because he attempts to cover too much of the exciting reality that was nineteenth century Colorado.

This paper does not purport to be a survey of all the fiction of Leadville. It examines only a few books that will illustrate the wide variety of fiction that used Leadville as a setting. At the same time, it should be remembered that Leadville was only one of many mining towns in Colorado and many of them were used for the same purposes as Leadville was, as a setting for fiction. Leadville is typical, and representative of them all.

Some of the stories discussed take place only partly in Leadville. Authors skipped from town to town for two reasons. First of all, they wanted to be authentic, and mining people were restless drifters. A second reason is more practical.. Many of the writers were trying to get the flavor of Colorado, not Leadville, and they wanted to cover as much of the state as possible, thereby appearing to be "fair" to all sections of the state and gaining a wider reading audience. Maybe the Eastern reader who did not know about Leadville would recognize the name Cripple Creek and feel that the story was about the "real" West, whatever that is.

From the discussion of each book, the author's style, plot and theme will become apparent. There is a wide--if bad--range of literary value. From this it will be possible to determine, at least in general terms, how accurately these authors portrayed the real town of Leadville.

Mary Hallock Foote

Mary Hallock Foote is most representative of what a "Leadville writer" should be. The wife of a mining engineer, she lived in Leadville at the peak of the boom. It was only one of many mining towns she saw, but it provided the setting for three of her seven novels, and those three were among her best.³⁶ Today, Mrs. Foote's writing is known in a limited way through anthologies. Levette Jay Davidson includes a scene from The Led-Horse Claim in his Literature of the Rocky Mountain West; and in Selected American Prose, 1841-1900, Wallace Stegner prints "How the Pump Stopped at the Morning Watch," set in Green Valley, of the Sierra Nevada.³⁷ Mary Lou Benn published Mary Hallock Foote in Idaho, an extension of her Denver University master's thesis that consists mainly of personal recollections of Mrs. Foote's friends and relatives. Thomas Donaldson gives Mrs. Foote a chapter in his book Idaho of Yesterday. Neither of these helps in studying Mrs. Foote's Colorado writing.

Wallace Stegner thinks there is some literary value in Mrs. Foote's stories: "Her mining camps in California, Colorado and Idaho are almost the only real ones in local color fiction--very much more real than those of Bret Harte. By no means a major figure, she is too honest to be totally lost."³⁸ Later, he says she does "the only serious writing after Bret Harte

³⁶ In Leadville, Led-Horse Claim, John Bodewin's Testimony, Last Assembly Hall. Elsewhere: In Exile, A Touch of the Sun, Edith Bonham, Coeur d-Alene.

³⁷ Levette Jay Davidson and Prudence Bostwick, Literature of the Rocky Mountain West, (Caldwell, Idaho, 1939). Wallace Stegner, Selected American Prose: (The Realistic Movement) 1841-1900 (New York, 1958).

³⁸ Stegner, p. xi.

to deal with mining-camp society, and virtually the only serious fiction which has dealt with the camps from intimate knowledge."³⁹ In his study of mining fiction, Merchant asserts that "Mrs. Foote's decorous attempts to tell the truth about the frontier as she saw it and to free herself from editorial formulas which imposed a happy ending on her first mining story, The Led-Horse Claim, is an example of artistic integrity which...is unusual in the generally commercial field of prospecting and mining fiction."⁴⁰

The Led-Horse Claim was published in 1882 and is in the strictest sense a sentimental formula novel more interested in "message" than in mountains. The reader today finds it tedious reading. The plot is simple. The hero, Hilgard (rarely referred to by his first name, George), is a young engineer from the East, who falls in love with Cecil Conrath at first sight. Her brother, the manager of the neighboring Shoshone mine, has dug into the Led-Horse claim, established a guarded barricade, and is working the Led-Horse vein. Hilgard kills Conrath in an underground showdown and Cecil turns from his love. Both leave Leadville for the East. In New York, by chance they stay in the same hotel. Cecil nurses Hilgard through an attack of fever. When he recovers, she leaves again, and goes to her grandmother's home, which is near the school where Hilgard's half-brothers are students. The lovers are finally united in a touching scene by the frozen pond when Hilgard unexpectedly appears searching for his brothers. Hilgard and Cecil are married, but not in the happiest of situations, for Cecil's elderly grandmother cannot forget that Hilgard killed her grandson. Sentimental melodrama mars the happy ending.

³⁹ Stenger, p. 117.

⁴⁰ Merchant, p. 396.

These fantastic coincidences take place in the East, far from Leadville, and concern us only as a conclusion to a series of events that begin against a credible backdrop, no matter how incredible the chain of events themselves may be. There can be no doubt that Mary Hallock Foote knew Leadville, and the mines. The incident that Mr. Davidson includes in his anthology is a trip into the mine taken by Cecil, her brother, and a friend, Mrs. Denny. Only someone who had been in the mines and had been frightened by the awful blackness could write this description:

Cecil closed her eyes; they ached with the small, sharp spark of her candle set in that stupendous darkness.

What a mysterious, vast, whispering dome was this! There were sounds which might have been miles away through the deadening rock. There were far-off, indistinct echoes of life, and subanimate mutterings, the slow respirations of the rocks, drinking air and oozing moisture through their sluggish pores, swelling and pushing against their straitening (sic) bonds of timber. Here were the buried Titans, stirring and sighing in their lethargic sleep.

Cecil was intensely absorbed listening to this strange, low diapason of the under world. Its voice was pitched for the ear of solitude and silence. Its sky was perpetual night, moonless and starless, with only the wandering, will-o'-the-wisp candle-rays, shining and fading in its columnated avenues, where ranks of dead and barkless tree-trunks repressed the heavy, subterranean awakening of the rocks.

Left to their work, the inevitable forces around her would crush together the sides of the dark galleries, and crumble the rough-hewn dome above her head. Cecil did not know the meaning of the power of this inarticulate underground of life, but it affected her imagination all the more for her lack of comprehension. Gradually her spirits sank under an oppressive sense of fatigue; she grew drowsy, and her pulse beat low in the lifeless air. She dropped against the damp wall of rock, and her candle, in a semi-oblivious moment, dropped from her lax fingers, and was instantly extinguished.

It seemed to the helpless girl that she had never known darkness before. She was plunged into a new element, in which she could not breathe, or speak, or move. It was chaos before the making of the firmament...⁴¹

⁴¹ Mary Hallock Foote, The Led-Horse Claim, (New York, 1882), pp. 113-114. Subsequent references refer to this edition.

Unfortunately, this is the only time that Mrs. Foote deals with the mines directly in her story. Even this underground scene degenerates into sentimentalism when Hilgard comes along, disguised as a miner-spy, and "saves" Cecil. Despite this ridiculous conclusion, the passage was obviously written by someone familiar with the deep interiors of the mines and no other writer of American fiction can make that claim, not even Bret Harte in California.

If the reader can overcome distaste with stylish nineteenth century diction, Mrs. Foote's opening description of Leadville is also impressive. It reflects her own initial reaction to the cold, new town of Leadville. After she discusses the "olive-leaf of Eastern capital" brought to Leadville by "those uncertain doves of promise" she describes the boom:

The snows of that bleak altitude give their first warning while the September sun is still strong: By November they may be said to prevail; but no disheartening combination of bad weather, worse roads, and worst accommodations at the journey's end, could deter the pioneers from bearing a city into the unfriendliest spot where such exotic growth ever flourished. Their movement had the absolute conviction, the devotedness, of a crusade. They pressed onward, across the Great South Park, following its white wagon-trails which rise and sink with the long swells of the archaic sea; pausing in the dreary valley at the foot of the pass, which shelters the caravansary-like town of Fairplay; struggling upward, in the cold light of early morning, along the mountain sides;...on again into the strenuous air of the summits, following the pass as it staggers through the wild canons; dizzily winding, by weary grades, down to the desolate land of promise. (pp. 9-10)

In these two passages, Mrs. Foote's talents as a Western local colorist are obvious in her attention to local detail and atmosphere.

In The Led-Horse Claim, when Mrs. Foote is not dealing with descriptions of the mines and the town she knew, her style becomes conventional. She drops classical allusions into her narrative to illustrate to her Eastern readers that she is not a crude "Westerner": "The hat he lifted as he offered it was a very bad one, but the head it did its best to disfigure might have been modelled for the head of a young Jason at the time his personal

appearance did him such good service at the court of King Aetes." (p. 19)

Her character descriptions are sometimes quite painful. Here she describes Hilgard, who fifteen years earlier in the Civil War "would have been the idol of his men, the life of his mess," the hero admired by all the girls, but in Leadville

Hilgard's excess of good looks was a positive inconvenience. The camp, at that period of its existence, took more thought for its roots than its blossoms. Hilgard's splendid efflorescence was looked upon with a certain suspicion by the sturdy, masculine growths around him. Ugly men who relied upon their fruits, and felt that nature had disguised them, were not likely to enjoy it. (pp. 23-23)

Even worse than this is the flat diction of the "love plot." When Cecil tells Hilgard her brother's death means an end to their love, she employs all the cliches of nineteenth century sentimentalism:

"You are all that I have left," [she says before she realizes he killed Conrath].

He did not speak, but gently unclasped her hands and moved a little away from her. Would she ever come to him again and put up her arms to him, owning him as her only earthly refuge?...

She kept her eyes on his face, without listening to his words.

"You must not look so! You must not suffer so for me! Ah, think how much worse it might have been!" (p. 179)

She discovers he was in the underground battle and shot her brother.

The climax should wring a sentimental tear:

They looked at each other in the desolate silence that followed, and then she asked,--

"Why did you go down?"

"West would have gone alone. You cannot ask me why I did not let one of my men take my place?"

"It does not matter," she said.

"No, it does not matter; the responsibility is mine. Cecil, I am the same man you gave your promise to last night. I do not love such work. I went into it, sick at heart. I wish, God knows, I were in his place!"

"I wish we both were. Oh! my heart is broken!"

"But you cannot mean that it's all over between us? Does it make no difference that it was forced upon me? I have to say it: We were on our own ground; their barricade was fifty feet within our lines. A barricade that is only for defence does not have a door in it; and, Cecil, they were five to one!" (pp. 179-182)

So, because the hero has overcome the villain in a heroic, unmatched fight, they must keep apart, because sad Cecil asserts, "It is the only way to bear it." This passage is the only explanation the author feels is necessary to explain the ensuing chain of chance meetings and separations. In 1922, Mrs. Foote wrote to a friend, "My poor Cecil! What a silly sort of heroine she would seem today. Yet girls were like that...in my time."⁴² Her own tastes evidently followed the decline of the sentimental tradition.

That Mrs. Foote can write effective dialogue and create realistic scenes is illustrated by this Irish dialect passage between Cecil's servant Molly and a miner suitor from the Led-Horse mine:

"The water is that hard, it's enough to take the skin off your hands," Molly continued, "and the ground's as black as the stove, with the crock off o' thim burnt woods, an' every man o' you leavin' the print of his fut on the floors. Sure I might be on me knees from mornin' to night, and they'd never look clean!"

"You'd not be scrubbin' floors if you was over there!" the young timberman remarked, with emphasis that brought the color into Molly's cheeks.

"And who'd be doin' it for me?" she asked, in a high voice. "Is it the men that scrubs the floor over there and the women that works underground?" (p. 134)

But in spite of several fine passages, rare in mining fiction, The Led-Horse Claim is still a minor novel. The plot is simple, shallow and predictable. The hero and heroine are from a familiar, overworked mold; Eastern, well-educated, entirely out of place in their western setting, and Mrs. Foote is

⁴² Merchant, p. 224.

wise in returning them to the East where they belong. The characters with some individual interest are not well enough developed to save the book from the burden of such weak main characters. There is a doctor, Thomas Godfrey, who shows promise at the first of the novel as a complex character, the degenerated wizened confidant, but he drops out of the narrative as the rivalry between Conrath and Hilgard develops, and appears again only briefly at the end. The maid Molly is included only as a contrast between kitchen warmth and bantering friendship and Cecil's lonely life in the parlor.

The plot is not only predictable and built upon an amazing series of coincidences, but also vague in key places. The reason for the fight is never fully explained. Writing for an Eastern audience, totally unfamiliar with the mines, Mrs. Foote should explain what a barricade is, how the thieves managed to "steal" the ore, how Hilgard set about to prove their robbery. She centers all her story on Cecil and Hilgard, and brings in details of the fight only when the information changes their relationship. The climactic underground battle is never described beyond the passage just quoted, the technical formality that threw the case out of court, precipitating the shooting, is never explained.⁴³

Of course, to Mrs. Foote and her publishers, these details were minor.

"Mrs. Foote was urged to write The Led-Horse Claim because Gilder [her

⁴³ The legal aspects, slighted in The Led-Horse Claim, are the subject of John Bodewin's Testimony (1886), Mrs. Foote's next book. It is even more contrived than the earlier novels and deals with the moral as well as the physical dangers of mining. It "almost parodied her view of a mining town as a place of moral and physical danger." (Merchant, p. 234) A rare copy of this book, available in the Western History Collection of the Denver Public Library, was unobtainable for this report.

publisher] knew she was in possession of Western material and because he knew she could be trusted to handle it with suitable refinement."⁴⁴ If the battle in The Led-Horse Claim is based on a real incident like the one described between Williams, Stevens and Leiter, that involved several hundred men, then Mrs. Foote has certainly reduced it. Of course, we must also concede that this reduction could be for dramatic simplicity.

In spite of its unbelievable plot, The Led-Horse Claim remains the best example of nineteenth century writing that deals in any way with the mines. Among the books considered in this study, it is the only one that has as the basis of the story the actual mines that made Leadville the booming city it was.

The Last Assembly Ball was published in 1889. It deals with a completely different and equally fascinating aspect of life in Leadville; the strict social code developed by people intent on keeping some order in the chaos of rapid growth. This theme Mrs. Foote states in an essay introduction in which she denies the Eastern assumption that "nothing can be freer and simpler than the social life of the far West, exemplified by the flannel shirt and the flowing necktie." A young society, says Mrs. Foote, is more exacting in its self-restraint than an older, more stable group, because it has no methods. She makes some thoughtful observations about the booming mining camp:

In constructing a pioneer community, one must add to the native, Western-born element, the "tenderfoot" element, so called,--self-conscious, new to surrounding standards, warped by disappointment or excited by success, torn, femininely speaking, between a past not yet abandoned, and a present reluctantly accepted. Add, generally, the want of homogeneity in a population hastily recruited from divers States, cities, nationalities, with a surplus of youth, energy, incapacity, or misfortune to dispose of...⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Foote, The Last Assembly Ball, pp. 5-6. Subsequent references refer to this edition.

The result is the story of The Last Assembly Ball. This introduction signals a different trend in Mrs. Foote's writing, discarding the Eastern sentimental formula love story for a more Western story. She is conscious she is "writing of a new and important cultural scene."⁴⁶ The Last Assembly Ball is vastly different from The Led-Horse Claim, with strengths and weaknesses of its own. There is no direct concern with the mines in the second novel. Indeed, if we did not know Leadville was a mining town, nothing in the story would reveal it.

The plot again is quite predictable, if different from the earlier novel. The concern is not with mines but with the problem of social position in the West which has no mores of its own, yet finds Eastern standards hard to hold on to. The hero again comes from the East. Francis ("Frank") Embury suffered a "concussion of the heart" when his family refused their consent for his marriage to a distant cousin. He turned to the West to forget the East, working as an assayer in the "wild west" of Leadville. In the town he lives in a rooming house run according to the strict rules of Eastern etiquette superimposed by Mrs. Fanny Dansken. Against all warnings from Mrs. Dansken, he carries on an innocent flirtation with the serving girl, Milly Robinson. He proposes to her and marries her in one evening, to save his pride and her feelings after a disastrous attempt to introduce her at the town's fashionable Assembly Ball. After they are married, he discovers she followed a no-good husband to Leadville, not a brother. She has borne a still-born child, an even more serious flaw. Within twenty-four hours, Francis commits suicide by allowing an unwilling friend to shoot him in a senseless duel, the result of an incident at the Ball.

⁴⁶ Merchant, p. 235.

Like The Led-Horse Claim, the basic plot is sentimental, but more tragic than Hilgard's and Cecil's. The hero is from the East, but the heroine is an "undesirable," a Canadian girl with no background, no family, no breeding and a dead, no-good husband. That she is a victim of circumstance is immaterial to the strict Leadville society. The ending of the story is artificial. Francis dies because the book must end, and not from any natural development of the plot. Why it must end so drastically is puzzling. Mrs. Foote was a part of Leadville society. Either she saw the fruitlessness of such a marriage and couldn't realistically end the book with a promise that they would work out their differences, or else she genuinely disapproved of such a match and wrote the book as a broad hint to innocent Easterners coming into the West. Mrs. Foote includes many essay-like passages of straightforward advice that reflect a realistic outlook on the situation with some bitterness that such a situation must exist. This is seen especially in the speeches of Mrs. Dansken, who has set herself up as the watchdog of her young roomers' morals. All her young men are from good Eastern families and she believes it is her duty to return them to the East with no extra baggage or damaging effects from their stay in the West. "Eastern women may be wanted in the West," she says, "but Western women are never wanted in the East. Why? Because there are women enough there already." (p. 33) Before the Ball, Mrs. Dansken tries to explain why Francis must not take Milly:

"Now I'd just as soon dance with Milly or with Ann either, as to wipe dishes or make beds with them; but I've no business to make it awkward for the others. You'll find the St. Louis ladies are particular whom they dance with. I'm hardly up to the mark myself. The woman who works for her living must expect to rank below the woman who has got a husband to work for her." (p. 117)

Against this pessimistic warning, Mrs. Foote is careful to include the parson's wife's more optimistic view of marriage:

"There's always marriages just as risky as yours is, when a new country is being settled up -- young men and women meeting together, with all sorts of families back of them, so pleased with all the new ways of seeing one another, and nothing plain and natural to show 'em their inside differences. Why, it's the greatest wonder in the world they ever make out as they do, the most of 'em." (p. 166)

Yet Francis dies and Milly is left alone, so we are no closer to an answer to Mrs. Foote's own attitude. She presents many sides of a situation she observed first hand for several years. She was herself one of the few women in the mining camp. She would have been one of "those St. Louis women" who were particular about their dancing partners. Probably she knew women like Mrs. Dansken, but she sympathized with these hasty Western marriages and agreed with the parson's wife, that sometimes they worked out. But in her own writing, she couldn't bring herself to present a hopeful situation.

This aspect of Mary Hallock Foote's plot is the basis for much of the later fiction about the boom town. The love stories in the twentieth century deal with similar situations in a less sentimental, awkward way. The stories of Baby Doe Tabor and Molly Brown later demonstrated some aspects of this early fiction.

In this novel, Mrs. Foote has improved her narrative style. Her descriptions do not so often allude to the classics. Her dialogue is less stilted. Her characters are more fully drawn, especially the interesting Mrs. Dansken. Her opening description of Leadville in this novel reflects the town and the theme:

...The town was in a state of chaotic expansion, with throes of laughter at its own unwieldiness. It was difficult to get enough to eat, impossible to find a decent place to eat it in. Ancient deplorable jokes about the "forty-niners" who slept in barrels at five dollars a night, with their feet outside, were revived with childish appreciation of their humor. Soft-handed youths, fresh from Eastern colleges and ball-rooms, found themselves

twirling frying-pans as familiarly as if they had been pretty girls' fans or favors in a german, and better than a rose in a button-hole was the button itself, when it could be relied upon not to come off...(pp. 14-16)

In character description, this novel far surpasses the insipid, shallowly-drawn characters of The Led-Horse Claim. Mrs. Dansken is by far the best, comparable to the doctor Thomas Godfrey in the first novel, who was unfortunately shoved into the background and forgotten. This description of Mrs. Dansken shows Mrs. Foote's talents for character description at her best, however weak that may still be:

They knew by heart all the playful, mocking changes of her bright, untender face. It was not a remarkable face, taking its feature by feature, but it kept one interested...She had exceedingly small hands, pretty in the way which is said to be American, and she used them with charming facility. They were, indeed, prettier to watch than her face;...The queen of landladies had no idea of entertaining herself or her boys, as she called them, in a way that would ultimately be bad for business...she would as soon have thought of sacrificing the remains of her complexion to a pink bonnet as of arranging herself for the rest of her life in trying conjunction with a husband obviously her junior. (pp. 30-31)

A full character description of Frank is never given. Possibly Mrs. Foote realized that her Eastern hero was not as interesting as her characters who were a natural part of the West. But even Frank is a more human hero, with faults, warmth and impulsiveness, than the perfectly vague Hilgard.

In The Last Assembly Ball, Mrs. Foote improves her dialogue between the lovers. In this scene they meet by accident by the kitchen wood pile:

"I heard you say that you had forgotten your kindlings; and it's so late, you know, and so horribly cold" --

Certainly the thing he was doing, waiting upon Mrs. Danskens' waitress, called for an apology, even to the waitress herself...

Milly held out her apron. "Run in; run in, quick!" she commanded. "You'll freeze to death!"

She laughed excitedly as she ran before him into the kitchen and closed the door upon them both. It occurred to Frank that he had never heard her laugh before -- he had never heard, in the camp, a girl's laugh that was innocent. (p. 98)

This dialogue is quite a development from the stilted language of Hilgard and Cecil, and the love plot itself is much more carefully developed. Several scenes such as this occur, and Frank outlines his argument against Mrs. Dansken as the ill-fated romance progresses. In contrast, The Led-Horse Claim love plot is based on chance meetings in the woods, at a dance, in a mine. From the first, it is assumed they love each other. Frank fights with himself and Mrs. Dansken's approval every step.

Mary Hallock Foote is by no means a major American writer of the nineteenth century. She is not even the best writer Colorado has produced. But she is the best local colorist to write in Colorado. She was obviously aware of the strange life that swarmed around her in the high, strange city and she observed it carefully enough to describe the grim underground life in the mines or the confusion of a new society. Although she insists on including Eastern heroes and heroines, she creates some mildly interesting minor characters who reflect the true West--the doctor who has given up, the landlady with no past--both seem genuine parts of the Leadville setting.

Although her diction is sentimental when she deals with the town of Leadville, she describes the town as vividly as a nineteenth century woman writer could. As she continued to write, she began to break away from the sentimental formula novel that called for genteel heroes and heroines who overcame all obstacles to live happily ever after. We see her shifting from this formula to a more realistic plot in The Last Assembly Ball. Mrs. Foote's uncertain position concerning marriage probably reflects her own shift of attitude from that of a transplanted Eastern lady to someone who understands the unique problems of a new country populated by people of Eastern origins, encountering a totally un-Eastern situation. When her husband moved on to Idaho, she continued to write. Coeur D'Alene set in

that state is her most important mining novel, according to Merchant, and is concerned not with love or society but with the more important problem of the struggle between labor and capital.

But in these two Leadville novels is the basis for much of the later fiction that deals with Leadville and indeed with all western mining camps. In the dime novels, we see the further eclipse of the Eastern hero and heroine. In the stories of Marian Castle and Dorothy Gardiner the problems of mismatched marriages are considered in more detail, over a longer period of time. With William MacLeod Raine, the "Western" is fully developed, and a similar situation, the displaced Easterner is handled in a much more "typically" Western manner. Frank Waters tries to cover the entire West -- mines, society, wealth, poverty, family, fortune. Mary Hallock Foote has the distinction of being first, and anticipating most of the themes of later writers.

The Dime Novels

The dime novel, says Hart, "was a glorious substitute for life, fulfilling the promises that reality broke."⁴⁷ Henry Nash Smith explains the popularity of this subliterary movement as the appeal of these stories to the "mass dream" that soap operas and comic books exploit today.⁴⁸ We have already alluded to the popularity of the Colorado setting in these novels. The first Leadville work we will discuss appeared in March, 1886. The

⁴⁷ Hart, p. 153.

⁴⁸ Henry Nash Smith, Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth, (New York, 1950), p. 101.

other two were published in 1889 and 1897. According to Smith, by this time the publishers were finding the pressures of competition forced them to resort to more sensationalism. This general trend is impossible to prove in only three novels, but the robbers and detectives are there.

The dime novel existed alongside the sentimental story. In fact, the first dime novel was written by Ann Sophia Stephens, a feminine sentimental-ist.⁴⁹ From the sentimental tradition, dime novels took some elements -- the fainting heroine, the Eastern hero, but they soon acquired distinctive Western personalities, often rejecting the East entirely. Sometimes they spoke in dialect and usually they acted nothing like their shallow sentimental Eastern-raised counterparts.

These novels were aimed at an entirely different audience than Mrs. Foote's hardback books. They appealed to the common man, the uneducated, who had no first-hand knowledge of Mrs. Foote's "society." Readers wanted a plot, not theme or character development or moral.

The setting in the dime novel is of even less importance than in the novels of Mary Hallock Foote, who lived in Leadville and evidently wrote some of her books out of a thoughtful concern about things she saw.

Wild Dick Turpin, the Lion of Leadville; or, the Lone Hand appeared in 1886. It was written by William H. Manning, one of Beadle and Adams' hack writers who started writing for them when he was seventeen. Like many of their authors, he used many pseudonyms, but this popular number was written under his own name.

The plot of Wild Dick Turpin is quite complicated. It centers on the mysterious title figure, possibly intended to recall to mind the eighteenth-century English highwayman with the same name. As the story opens, Turpin

⁴⁹ Hart, p. 97.

is the terror of the roads around Leadville. But the reader soon discovers that he is a road agent only in order to search for the "Man with the Scar." Wild Dick, in disguise, has courted a farmer's daughter, Lois Legrand, but on the night of their wedding, jealous Red Kit betrays Dick and when the sheriff comes to arrest him, Dick shoots out a kerosene lamp. It falls on the sheriff who is badly burned and, in the dark confusion, Dick changes clothes with him. For the rest of the novel, Dick impersonates the sheriff who lies at the door of death with burns and brain fever. Wild Dick must save Lois' father from an unjust murder conviction and try to solve the riddle of the "Man with the Scar" while protecting himself from the wily, unscrupulous Jude Peterson, the sheriff's trusted "police spy," The real sheriff's wife and children appear and Dick must protect them without revealing his identity. The disguise is simplified by the fact that Wild Dick Turpin looks amazingly like Sheriff Bradstreet. Finally all is explained, but not until innumerable red herrings have been dragged across the trail. Of course, Wild Dick and Robert Bradstreet are half-brothers, Jude Peterson and his partner Meg are sister and brother and the "Man with the Scar" is their father who has haunted Dick for revenge for some obscure wrong, just as Jude and Meg have persecuted Bradstreet. Bradstreet recovers from his burns and is reunited with his long-lost family, Wild Dick is pardoned for his highway robbery, the "Man with the Scar" lies dead and Jude is uncovered as the scoundrel he really is.

One interesting twist to the plot is the love affair between Dick and Lois Legrand. After the ill-fated wedding attempt, she lies weak with brain fever from the tremendous excitement. Wild Dick as the sheriff cannot go to her, so he sends his trusted buddy, Bowie Ben. Meanwhile, Red Kit, who still loves Wild Dick, tries to make up for her hasty betrayal of him by

performing many helpful services for the supposed sheriff. At the climax of this plot, Dick releases condemned Legrand from jail and follows him to the farm so they can flee Leadville together. Instead, he finds this note:

"Richard: -- I beg that you will not think too harshly of me, for my own heart bleeds as I write. I am about to flee, as planned, but not in your company. Father and mother are both against you, and they have convinced me --against my will, believe me! -- that it is best that you and I should forever part. I am sorry that this is so, but I feel that 'tis my duty to obey them. Besides, Bowie Ben has asked me to become his wife, and since he has been coming here I have seen that he is a perfect gentleman. I am sure that I shall be happy with him, and we shall be married as soon as possible; and then, with father and mother, go to some distant place.

"I am afraid you will blame me, Richard, but what can I do? Father and mother will not consent to ever speak with you again, and -- I do not feel that I am to blame for loving Bowie Ben. Of course I must consider my own happiness first of all, and I know that as his wife, I shall be happy. Richard, good-by! We shall never meet again, for I am going far, far away, but I shall think kindly of you, and hope for your happiness. I hope, too, that you will be a better man. If you had been what you seemed, all would have been well; but I have been reared to regard honesty, truth and honor as desirable above all things. You did wrong to deceive me, and, of course, you cannot expect me to marry a road-agent and outlaw.

"Lois Legrand"⁵⁰

The reader is expected to forget that Bowie Ben was also a road-agent and outlaw, and that Wild Dick Turpin has just released Legrand from jail at the risk of his own life. But Wild Dick finds happiness with, of course, Red Kit who has stuck by him through thick and thin. The story ends in an awful stereotype:

There they said good-by, and as the young couple rode away the sun fell full upon Turpin's manly form and happy face; and it turned Red Kit's hair a deeper hue, bringing into strong relief the unutterable happiness which was in her great, tender eyes and on her perfect face.

And so they rode into the West. (p. 30)

⁵⁰ William H. Manning, Wild Dick Turpin, the Lion of Leadville (New York, 1886), p. 27. Subsequent references refer to this edition.

Although the plot of Wild Dick Turpin is impossible, it is easy to see why an average reader of the 1880's would enjoy it. There is suspense in every chapter. Although the outcome seems preposterous, most of the developments are fairly logical, if one doesn't look too far beneath the surface. It is hard to put it down, even if reading is continued for the sole purpose of learning what other possible plot contortions will next develop. The opening paragraph would be sure to catch the reader:

The report of a revolver rung [sic] out sharply on the air, and the half-dozen men who had been riding through Rattlesnake Gulch came to a halt. As one man they looked for him who had fired, but no one besides themselves was visible.

"Where is he?" asked one of their number.

"I am not sure it was he who fired," replied a finely-formed man who rode at the front.

"This is about the place, and that was the appointed signal."

"Other men about Leadville may fire a revolver. If Wild Dick Turpin is here, why don't [sic] he show himself?"

A mocking laugh floated out on the air.

"Why don't you look for him, Mighty Ruler of Leadville? Are your eyes blind that you cannot see?" (p. 1)

The action has started in a chain that doesn't stop for thirty triple-columned small typed pages. Anyone who wanted action would be hooked.

The characters themselves are overdrawn stereotypes. Wild Dick never thinks beyond his next action. Reasons why never enter his mind. In spite of the fact that he is an outlaw, he has never killed a man, and there are some ridiculous plot manipulations to prevent blood shed. Bowie Ben is the faithful friend until it becomes necessary to get rid of Lois so that Red Kit can conquer. Her father is held in jail on a trumped-up charge, found guilty by an unbelievably ignorant court, then easily released when Lois is

"well." The "Man with the Scar" is definitely a "deus ex machina." He appears only when Dick is doing so well that it looks like he will succeed, and he needs something to stand in his way, yet when the plot comes to an end, the man very satisfactorily dies, but not before making a full confession. The mystery man's stock of disguises belongs in a theatre, not in a novel. Jude Peterson is a crafty villain or a stupid bungler only as the plot demands.

The women in this novel present an interesting contrast to Mary Hallock Foote's women. Lois Legrand is obviously a "sleeper" inserted to satisfy the Eastern reader and as a foil for the more fully developed Red Kit. Lois is "beautiful in the full sense of the word, . . . and a grace of word and motion which might well charm any man." Yet, Lois turns out to be the less desirable mate for our hero. Another contrast is that of Meg, the villainess of the story. No such brazen woman would ever be treated by a sentimental novelist. She works mysteriously with Jude Peterson and is the one who plans the undoing of Sheriff Bradstreet. Red Kit presents an interesting combination of these two extremes. Sometimes she is villainous with her red hair in wild disarray, betraying Dick, berating him, lamenting her own actions. Other times she is the faithful helpmate. It is indicative of both the genre and the changing attitudes that such contrasts could be found in the same novel, much less within one character.

The setting of this dime novel is Leadville. The nickname of the hero would prove that, if there was no other evidence. No specific landmarks of the city are mentioned and the details that the author includes are general Western attitudes accepted as fact in the East. Probably Manning never saw Leadville, although Mr. Charles Bragin, a bibliophile of dime novels in New

York, insists that many of these writers did travel to places they used as settings, or at least read extensively about them. Lynchings were executed in Leadville, but probably not by masked men riding boldly through the streets as Manning describes them. In the scene at the Assembly Ball, Manning shows some knowledge about the social setting in Leadville. But even this is vague and probably inaccurate, since there is no evidence that these celebrations were held in private homes.

Evening!

The major's house was aglow with light, for it was the occasion of the grand ball. The eagerly-anticipated occasion had come...they were for the night as light-hearted and gay as though care and trouble were things never heard of in real life.

Dick Turpin was there in faultless evening dress...True, he was only a sheriff, but society lines were not tightly drawn in Leadville, and he had made himself a favorite.

...There were jeweled young ladies, prouder than their father; for they had been born to wealth instead of working long and hard for it; young butterflies they, fresh from school, with a rigid regard for new styles of pronunciation and a lofty contempt for the old; the same fastidious creatures, with French shrugs of their shapely shoulders...had called Dick Turpin a monster, ruffian, brute, and countless other names. (p. 21)

This passage contradicts the entire theme of The Last Assembly Ball.

Young men not of good birth or large fortunes certainly were not welcome in Leadville society. There was already a surplus. In fact, as Mr. Wilison points out, at most balls most of the women were married. A mining town in existence only seven years would have no native well-bred daughters "fresh from finishing school" as Manning asserts. The scene serves its purpose, however. It gives our hero a chance to "shine" among society. To cloud the evening, there is the inevitable encounter with the arch-villain, the "Man with the Scar," who is disguised perfectly as a Russian count.

Manning has evidently used Leadville because of its alliterative value and because it was a town readily known to his Eastern reading audience. They would know even less about the real town than he did. Setting was unimportant to Manning or his readers. Their only interest was in an exciting plot, and they certainly got that in Wild Dick Turpin, the Lion of Leadville; or, the Lone Hand.

Edward L. Wheeler created for Beadle and Adams one of their most successful characters, Deadwood Dick. Little is known about Wheeler himself. He lived in Pennsylvania most of his life. At one time he managed a theatrical company that produced his own play, Deadwood Dick, a Road Agent, A Drama of the Gold Mines, which was successful in New York. There is some question as to whether Wheeler wrote some of the later Deadwood Dick issues. Johannsen believes he died in 1885. Yet ninety-seven Deadwood Dick, Jr., novels appeared between 1885 and 1887, although no other novels signed by Wheeler appeared. Either there was a tremendous backlog, or, more likely, someone else carried on the successful Deadwood Dick series under his name, not an uncommon practice at Beadle and Adams. Wheeler affected the manners of the Westerner, wearing a Stetson hat and calling everyone "pard" but Johannsen says there is no reason to believe he was ever farther west than Titusville, Pennsylvania.⁵¹

Johannsen lists 130 Deadwood Dick titles so it is evident that no study of the West or the dime novel would be complete without some mention of the famous hero.⁵² Henry Nash Smith deals at length with Deadwood Dick as a

⁵¹ Johannsen, vol. 2, pp. 294-296.

⁵² Johannsen, vol. 2, pp. 358-359.

distinctive Western hero, as opposed to the earlier Beadle hero who was a direct descendent of Cooper.⁵³ Deadwood Dick originated in the West. His dress is theatrical and elegant. He does not speak dialect like earlier Western-born heroes unless his business demands it. He is without social rank, but he is skilled at riding and shooting and is still eligible for romantic attachments. Above all, he is an individual, a self-made man, able to overcome all obstacles by his own courageous stand. Deadwood Dick is not a struggling hero, however. He has a substantial income from mining properties that allows him to indulge at will in his detective escapades.

Through the 130-odd Deadwood Dick novels, the plots take many confusing turns. He is married several times, finally to the famous Western female, Calamity Jane. At times he is the traditional western villain-bandit. Most often he is a detective. "...there are disquieting hints that at bottom he is a culture-hero of the Orpheus-Herakles type, for after being hanged as a bandit, as he remarks, 'I was cut down and resuscitated by a friend and thus, while I hung and paid my debt to nature and justice, I came back to life a free man whom no law in the universe could molest for past offenses.'"⁵⁴ Smith attributes Deadwood Dick's popularity to a combination of sensationalism and ascribing to him all the talents ever awarded to a Western hero in fact or fiction. "Deadwood Dick is certainly not an integrated construction of the imagination, and his fame reflects the kind of sensationalism that increased so markedly in the later 1870's."⁵⁵

⁵³ Smith, pp. 109-112.

⁵⁴ Smith, pp. 111-112.

⁵⁵ Smith, p. 112.

Deadwood Dick's Leadville Lay; or, Bristol and Bucket's Boom appeared March 5, 1889. Deadwood Dick is asked by a pretty young Jewess, Rachel Cohen, to recover jewels stolen by road agents who also killed her father. To do this, Deadwood Dick, disguised as an old Jew, Samuel Jacobs, sets up a pawnshop. He rooms with the Sheldons and his first visit saves the widow and her lovely daughter from an overbearing landlady, Mrs. Redfern, who turns out to be the villain. The plot involves road agents and meetings at the outlaw's bar, Pop Pancake's (Pap Wyman's?) outside the city limits, where Deadwood Dick, disguised as a rich Colonel Cushing eavesdrops on Mrs. Redfern and her accomplice, Ben Brice. Brice turns "good," but dies before Deadwood Dick can return him to his wife, Edna Grey. She works as a waitress-bar girl and delivers several pathetic speeches warning young girls not to come West looking for wealth or marriage. In the wealthy Crawford home, Deadwood Dick discovers some of the stolen jewels but the owner will not say who sold them to her. Finally, after elaborate traps have been set and sprung, Mrs. Redfern is defeated, the jewels are recovered and everyone is happy.

This novel is shorter by half than either of the other two dime novels on Leadville. The mystery interest is satisfied by elaborate disguises, just as Wild Dick Turpin was disguised as the sheriff, but there is no complicated double cross or love interest and no question of who Deadwood Dick is. He is aware of the ladies, but remains aloof as a good hero should. The villainess, Mrs. Redfern, is a plain crook. There is no hidden family feud necessary to explain her actions. These factors do not make the story less interesting, however. Wheeler was a master of story telling. In the first chapter, he briefly establishes the setting, then moves to a dim cafe where Rachel mysteriously lures our hero. The background is not sketched in until the second chapter. Action always comes first in the dime novel. Deadwood

Dick's disguises are wonderful stage devices. The Jew disguise depends a great deal upon dialect:

The remainder of the day was occupied by Dick in "fixing" up, not an easy metamorphosis, but, by perseverance, and with the aid of a wig, false beard, etc., he finally succeeded so well that Billy. [his partner] pronounced him A-1 Moses.

The Sheldons were then called in to view the transformation, and were filled with astonishment.

"I don't believe it is Mr. Bristol," Myra Sheldon openly declared.

"Mine teer young voman, dot shows how inoxberience you vas in shudging dose physiognominies!" Dick replied. "I pet haluf a tollar dot I vas dot same Meester Breestol."

"Hurrah for Sheeny Dick! cried Billy Bucket, in delight.⁵⁶

His disguise as Colonel Cushing is even more elaborate, featuring a black wig that reaches half-way to his waist, handle bar mustache, skin dyed "nut brown" and a suit of white duck, with a diamond in the bosom.

Wheeler employs dialect with some skill. Deadwood Dick himself can vary his speech depending upon whom he is talking to, and who he is. His natural speech is seen in these thoughts spoken aloud:

"That's a mighty smart girl," he reflected, as he smoked his cigar, leisurely, "a mighty smart girl. Her scheme is novel, practical, and certainly original. Had her case not had so much novelty in it, I should not have undertaken it. But, I am in for it, and I will see it through." (p. 2)

When Deadwood Dick talks to a masked horseman who is carrying off Ella Crawford for some obscure reason he speaks "tough."

"Halt, and dismount, or you're a dead man!"

The mountain pirate drew rein, but did not offer to obey orders, further.

"Who are you? What the deuce do you mean?" he roared, laying his hand toward his belt.

⁵⁶ Wheeler, Deadwood Dick's Leadville Lay, p. 3. Subsequent references refer to this edition.

"Drop on that, or I'll plug ye!" Dick cried. "It (sic) you don't want daylight let through you, you will dismount, and lay the girl on the grass yonder. Come; no monkeyin'!" (p. 5)

Dick's sidekick, Billy Bucket, is even more colorful, although he too has trouble speaking a "pure" Western dialect. In spite of slang and misspellings, his sentence structure is quite elaborate:

"Well, after I left this shebang, I follered the nigger. .I kept as shady as I could, an' finally the nigger steered straight for a big house, over ag'in' the hill, and entered it, by the front door... finally, a boy went to the house, and left a letter there; an' as he kim away, I tackled him, and asked him who lived there. At first he was sassy, like, an' not inclined to tell, but, when I threatened to push his head for him, he began to holler, and said as how a woman named Mrs. Redfern lived thar!" (p. 7)

Wheeler's characters are not as confusing in motivation as Manning's. Deadwood Dick and Billy Bicket are "straight" Western heroes. There is no need for double cross to manipulate the plot as in Wild Dick Turpin. The heroines are products of the West with none of the Eastern prejudices reflected in Lois Legrand's family. Rachel Cohen has come from the East, but she is a Jewess and therefore released from any literary conventions of characterization and can take on her own personality. Edna Grey, the beer hall waitress married to Ben Brice, seems to be inserted for the moral she expounds, either as a genuine feeling on Wheeler's part or as a device to placate the "decent" folk who objected to dime novels as immoral. Says Edna, "...If I could only teach other girls the lesson I've been taught by going on the stage, I could save them many days -- ay! years of suffering."

Edward Wheeler evidently read avidly about the West because the details he includes about Leadville are quite accurate. His slips are on things he would not have considered important. Deadwood Dick hides among the hemlocks, not aspen or pine, when he saves Ella Crawford from her abductor. When he goes riding, it could be New York or Colorado, since there is no description of scenery or terrain. In historical accounts of Leadville, there is no

mention of active pawnbroking and the Jewish population of the West has always been minimal. This part of the plot sounds more like the East than Leadville, Colorado. There seems to be no reason why Wheeler needed to include the Jews except as an excuse to get Deadwood Dick into a novel disguise and to release him from any romantic attraction to Rachel.

On other details, Wheeler is accurate. Richard M. Bristol, alias Deadwood Dick, stays at the Clarendon, the finest hotel in Leadville, and the outlaw's hangout, Pop Pancake's, could be an echo of Pap Wyman's, although that man's saloon was above suspicion and was in the center of town, not outside it. Mrs. Crawford's wealth comes from stock she holds in the Little Pittsburgh, Tabor's world-famous mine, which Wheeler could have read about.

Wheeler goes to great length to explain that gambling has been outlawed in the city, and the lawless element run outside the city limits. By 1889 the town had calmed down, due to enforced law and dwindling population.

His description of Leadville weather is unlike any other. Due to the altitude and absence of humidity, cold in the mountains is usually crisp and clear, not raw or foggy. It is rarely stifling, unless Leadville suffered from smelter smoke. Above all, as we have observed in Mary Hallock Foote, the mines were anything but cozy!

If any one of my readers have ever been in the City of Leadville, they will know and appreciate what I mean by a dull morning in that mountain city.

The air was raw, the mountain-top was obscured in dense fog, which gradually and suffocatingly lowered; the aroma of everything was literally stifling.

A chill exchanged greetings with a warm wave, and then resumed rule with a vengeance.

The miners crept from their dens and darted into the inner recesses of the earth where all was at least warm and light, with cheerful complacency; the shopkeepers lazily opened their stores, and wondered how the day would turn out; the cocktail mixer had a busy time, and otherwise the town was very quiet. (p. 6)

Wheeler made an attempt to include details of the city. Manning ignored the city completely, never mentioning a place name or the mines. Wheeler evidently gained his limited knowledge from reading and talking with people who had traveled in the West. It is impossible to believe he ever had the time or the opportunity to travel there himself.

Deadwood Dick's Leadville Lay is part of one of Beadle and Adams' most famous series. Other Deadwood Dick stories take place in Leadville and other Colorado mining camps, for this hero had an affinity for camp life and may be responsible himself for popularizing Leadville and other Western camps. Many people gained most the knowledge they had of the west from this famous series. Calamity Jane and Deadwood Dick joined Buffalo Bill, another character who started as a subject for dime novels, and took advantage of his popularity in person, as prototypes of the Western hero, heroine and cowboy.

Joseph E. Badger, Jr., wrote The King-Pin Sport; or, the Missing Miner's Double Claimant for Beadle's New York Dime Library February 24, 1897. Badger's story is an unabashed detective tale with confusing plot that is straightened out only in the last pages.

Of all the dime novelists considered here, Joseph E. Badger had the best occasion to write of Colorado from first hand knowledge, yet his story contains the grossest exaggerations. At the age of eleven in 1859, Badger ran away from home in Bellmont, Kansas, and joined a wagon headed for the Colorado gold fields, working as a buffalo hunter. At nineteen, he began writing for Beadle and Adams and naturally turned to Colorado for some of his story

material. He was one of the most prolific and, according to Johannsen, one of the best of Beadle's writers.⁵⁷

Speed and accompanying carelessness may account for the inaccuracies in the Colorado setting he had seen first hand as a boy. The most obvious error is one of time. The King-Pin Sport takes place both in Leadville and Denver and back. Even today, with hard surface highways and speeding cars, this two hundred mile trip takes over three hours and, in the 1800's, even after the railroad reached Leadville, the trip was grueling. No one could make that trip by horse in less than a day and a half, and most probably it would take longer.

But such details are of little importance in a mystery story; twentieth century audiences swallow whole more monstrous James Bond fabrications. The plot is the thing, and if the hero must gallop from Leadville to Denver, then gallop he will.

Possibly as a coincidence, A. K. Sims' King-Pin Sport of the Leadville Lions; or, Hepburn, the Dude Detective from London appeared only ten days before King-Pin Sport; or the Missing Miner's Double Claimant.⁵⁸ "King-Pin" is a common name in the dime novels. Badger used it again in December, 1894, and calls his hero "the man from Denver" so evidently he thought of him as a product of the West, not an import as Sims pictures him.

⁵⁷ Johannsen lists 386 titles by Badger and includes an account by a Frankfort, Kansas, acquaintance who tells how Badger could write an 80,000 word novel in one week, sleeping two hours and working six, according to a strict schedule, vol. I, pp. 25-26.

⁵⁸ Johannsen, vol. I, p. 239.

The hero of this novel is less well drawn than Deadwood Dick, who had a definite character developed in a series, or Wild Dick Turpin who was the center of Manning's story. Badger has created some memorable characters besides the hero, however. In answer to the ad for information about H. K. Jones, two characters show up, complete with dialect and an intense hatred for each other that is only overcome when they fear they both shall lose out on the reward. King Pin Sport is talking to the bartender when the first one enters:

...that chat was abruptly terminated as a short, enormously fat man waddled into the saloon, casting one quick look around, then pressing forward to the bar, pulling a rumpled copy of the Herald from his flannel shirt, slapping it down on the bar, thumping it with one fat and grimy paw, then pointing out a particular advertisement with a stumpy forefinger as he huskily rumbled:

"What's that, an' who's him as axes fer H. K.? Whar's the money into it, an' who pays how much? Hey? Say?" ⁵⁹

Soon the other H. K. enters:

"Stiddy an' 'owld hon, there, will ye, ano?" Just then came a shrill, high-pitched and peculiarly accented voice from the front entrance; and as eyes shifted to suit, they saw a tall, roughly-clad personage stride across the threshold, one long arm gesticulating vigorously, the huge hand at its extremity gripping a copy of the Leadville Democrat.

"A success done wrecked, an' hyar comes the gee-raft!" rumbled the fat man, swinging his corporosity around to more squarely face this latest comer, "Whar's the monkey an' whar's the baboon's sister?"

"'Owld hon, gents!" repeated the new comer, flourishing the paper as he advanced. "'Oo's takin' me name hin vain, 'ere? Oo's hawskin' for H. K. Jones? W'ich his me, gents! hI'm willink for to make howth before hany bloomink beak has may -- w'ich?" (p. 3)

Of course, these two H. K.s (the fat man's initials stand for Henry Kane, corrupted to Harrycane; the skinny Cockney's, Hamilton King, "better known as Hupper Krust") are merely red herrings but they are delightful creations

⁵⁹ Badger, King-Pin Sport..., p. 3. Subsequent references refer to this edition.

in themselves, popping up at the climax to hinder the hero a great deal and help a little with a key piece of information.

This humor is in the second chapter after an effective but, for a long time, puzzling opening chapter, "Hunted Like a Mad Wolf," A man creeps along a ledge, just out of range of a rifle manned by an unidentified man. The mountain setting is established from the first paragraph:

"Steady, you brute!"

A half-groan, half-curse broke from the fever-parched lips of the rider as his mount stumbled and pitched forward, muzzle brushing the ground before he recovered, stung by spurs and lifted by rein.

It was a wild and difficult trail, where even a sure-footed mule might well have been excused for an occasional stumble, and the greatest marvel was that this poor, jaded starvation-stunted broncho was able to show any speed at all. (p. 2)

Finally, the hunted man approaches the "Magic City" of the Colorado silver fields:

He left the high ground, winning clear of stunted pines and other shrubbery, leaving the worst of the rocks and crags behind him, then entering the skirts of that marvelous mining-camp, beginning to breathe freely now that he found himself in easy reach of honest mankind once more. (p. 2)

But before he can tell his secret, he is shot down in cold blood.

In chapter one, the setting is therefore established and the plot starts in medias res, a typical dime novel device. The two H. K. Jones appear in chapter two, the dying man staggers into the saloon at the appropriate time and the plot begins to move sluggishly forward. As it turns out, the victim is unimportant to the plot. He was a member of the inevitable outlaw gang and intended to tell all, but King-Pin Sport figures it all out thirty pages later. It makes an effective opening, however, with action and setting established from the first word, and that was what Badger wanted.

The plot runs along the expected confusing line only to be drawn together in one grand climax. Distressed Fanny Barbour, searching for her father, relies on Ten-Strike Tom (an alternate name for King-Pin Sport) and upon Wallace Gilmore, whom Tom dislikes. Fanny is kidnapped in Denver, taken to an outlaw hideout in an abandoned mine and told her father is the head of a dangerous gang. Wallace Gilmore insisted on going with Fanny when she was kidnapped. He is beaten and left for dead and later turns up in the mine shaft to help Fanny escape, a plan which fails. It is left for Ten-Strike Tom to discover the hideout, with the help of the two H. K.'s and rescue Fanny and her father from the Masked Chief who has kept the emaciated man prisoner in the dark tunnels of the mine for a year, torturing him to force him to tell the location of his gold mine. The Masked Chief turns out to be the Deacon, a despicable character who appeared briefly earlier in the story, a typical Perry Mason technique. He is much like the "Man with the Scar" in Wild Dick Turpin.

This novel has much more overt love-making and suggestions of sadism in it than the other two. Wallace Gilmore steals a kiss from Fanny as they hide beneath the outlaw's cabin in the mine tunnel and, at the end of the story, King-Pin Sport, who naturally wins Fanny, shoves "pistols out of sight, putting his hands to far better use -- in his own estimation! Those hands closed upon the maiden's shoulders, drawing her still agitated figure close against his breast, and if that wasn't a warm, lover-like kiss--well, then the faint echoes told a scandalous lie!" (p. 30)

The sadistic tendency is seen in the description of the prisoner Anson Barbour as an "emaciated form...clad in rags and tatters. His hair and long beard were tangled and thickly frosted with silver threads. His face itself was gaunt with hunger and deeply lined by the tortures which had been measured

out to him..." (p. 27) Neither Wild Dick Turpin or Deadwood Dick would have kissed a lady publicly, and neither encountered such inhuman treatment. Even their opponents were human, moved by revenge or greed. One even turned out good. None of them tortured for the sheer enjoyment of it as the Masked Chief does.

Badger pays more attention to the Leadville setting than Manning does, but he does not include the place name details that make Wheeler's Deadwood Dick stories seem so authentic. Badger has created some humorous characters and his dialect--Cockney, Wester, Irish--is quite good, if difficult to read. But his main character is not as well drawn as either of the other two. We are never told anything of King-Pin's background--not even his full name. All we know is that he is a detective.

Badger's plot is the least clear of the three. It is not clear why Wallace Gilmore attacks the King-Pin Sport in the final rescue attempt. He evidently is only set up as a foil to Ten-Strike Tom for Fanny's hand and is therefore expendable, as the Legrand family was expendable to Wild Dick Turpin. There is no trusted confidant, as in the other two stories, so the reader is never sure just what the hero is thinking, since the author does not enter his thoughts. The movement from Leadville to Denver expands the possible range of activity but it is physically impossible.

These three dime novels illustrate how the hack writers used Leadville. None of them could possibly have known the town from personal experience as Mary Hallock Foote knew it. Their interest was in plot: in crime, love, fighting. Leadville differed from author to author as they altered it to suit their purposes--hemlocks or straggling pines, sweeping prairies or piles of rocks, a wild open gambling town or a calm, peaceful city. The

silver boom made Leadville a famous city in the early 1800's, just as competition among the various dime novel series demanded new and more exciting settings. Leadville was a natural choice. Of course, not many Beadle writers used Leadville as a setting, but it might be significant that two of their most valued writers, in terms of creations and sheer volume--Wheeler and Badger--chose Leadville. As we have pointed out, these three novels are by no means the only novels set in Leadville, but they are good representatives.

The only other nineteenth century writer deserving mention is Helen Hunt Jackson, who is best known for her novel concerning the plight of the Indians, Ramona. Her mining story for children, Nelly's Silver Mine (1878) is a charming tale of a little girl's search for a mine as one of her adventures in the new Colorado country. Her mining details are accurate--the black sand, the methods assayers used, the process of opening a mine--but the story does not take place specifically in Leadville.

Twentieth Century Writers

Twentieth century writers have recognized in Leadville a ready-made setting for romance or adventure. The fame of Maggie Brown and Baby Doe Tabor made the town a tourist attraction long after the mines became big business operations and a tired part of the landscape. Some authors attempt to represent "Colorado" in their novels, not specifically Leadville. The earliest of these was The Golden Lady (1936) by Dorothy Gardiner, a 1917 graduate of Colorado University. It concerns Evantha Aurelia Swenk, daughter of gambler Pompey Swenk and a washer woman, who grows up in Duke's Gulch and marries the much older owner of the Gulch's biggest mine. They move to Denver. He dies,

she travels in Europe Maggie Brown fashion, and finally returns to Duke's Gulch to guard the only thing she has salvaged from the 1929 depression, "The Golden Lady" mine--an echo of Baby Doe.

The details are fairly accurate, especially in Denver. Evantha sees Shore Acres at the Tabor Opera House, and stays at the Brown Palace. But the mining town is fictional. Besides having a plot that echoes Baby Doe and Maggie Brown, the story is bogged down with impossible names: Tandy Hicklin, Chuck-a-Luck Dell, Pompey Swenk, Panny and Bella Pancake, Ack Quaintance. Place names are just as bad; Swearing Canyon, Mount Arastra.

Despite these serious faults, the author's mountain descriptions are good. In this passage, Evantha reacts to Eastern ignorance of the West:

None of these Easterners knew of the dreary Western reaches, and they cared little whether Colorado prospered or not...For the first time in her life she looked on Colorado as it was; a land of violence, a place where man has ever wrestled with nature. Here nothing mattered but the struggle, the immediate necessity. Here gold was wrenched from the hills by main force; here crops grew only when the far snows were tapped...Even the climate was violent, baking hot in summer, bitter cold in winter.⁶⁰

Later she describes the mountains as "a wavy line that might have been drawn by a child with a blue crayon...humped and broken, a wall set against eternity. (p. 466)

Even these good descriptions cannot rescue the book from a lack of focus. Some of this same attempt to say everything about Colorado in one book is reflected in Frank Waters' volume, Wild Earth's Nobility (1935), one book in a trilogy that includes Dust Within the Rock (1940) and Below Grass Roots (1937). Waters' best-known book is Midas of the Rockies, a study of Winfield Scott Stratton, the carpenter who found gold at Cripple Creek. He figures in

⁶⁰ Dorothy Gardiner, The Golden Lady, p. 464. Subsequent references refer to this edition.

Wild Earth's Nobility in a minor way but much of what Waters did in his non-fiction work is reflected in the mass of details that clouds the plot line in his fiction. The hero's name, Rogier, is similar to Waters' mother's maiden name, Dozier, and suggests that this attempt at a "Colorado epic" is at least in part autobiographical.

Waters' book deals with Leadville only in passing. His main story is set in Colorado Springs. Rogier is a successful builder who ignores the Colorado Springs society, much to his wife's consternation. But he cannot ignore the lure of gold, and in spite of his scientific approach, his innate honesty leads him to trust unscrupulous partners in Cripple Creek. His fortune collapses, and he must begin again. In a limited way, Leadville is a part of this story that ranges from the city on the plains to New Mexico. Rogier's sister-in-law sends her lazy husband to Leadville where he disappears. Waters' description of this boom town is full of factual details. He describes Leadville as "barren and rocky, wild with hills and seamed with gulches, a desolate land raised to an altitude that made men fight for breath."⁶¹ Then he summarizes the early discoveries, the career of Tabor, the phenomenal growth of the town and the narrow Ute pass that was the only entrance into the city. He even mentions the lawlessness and the high prices. Even his brief attempts to capture the lyric beauty of the town are clogged with details:

Leadville, the silver city in a sea of silver, rose out of its snow and kept on booming, over two miles above the sea and higher in men's hopes...General Palmer, hearing that Ulysses S. Grant had arrived in San Francisco from Japan following his world tour, invited him to be guest of honor on the first train to enter Leadville...During the past year, Rogier heard, the mines of Leadville had produced almost nine million ounces of silver and over thirty-three thousand tons of lead. Gaunt men in rags laughed along the bar telling each other that silver bullion was selling at \$1.29 per ounce--higher than ever before. (pp. 151-152)

⁶¹ Frank Waters, Wild Earth's Nobility, p. 87. Subsequent references refer to this edition.

Waters also traces the history of Leadville's silver boom and its collapse in 1890, that lead to the panic of 1893. Leadville is an indicator and shows how one town's fall influenced the rise of another--Cripple Creek.

Details evidently are included to show the "real" Colorado, but they only clutter up an already long story and are almost as bothersome as the inaccuracies of the dime novels. His familiarity with the life in Colorado mining camps is much more "bookish" than the simple and accurate descriptions of Mary Hallock Foote.

A novelist who comes closer to achieving her purpose is Marian Castle. Her novel, The Golden Fury, was a selection of the Dollar Book Club and an alternate of the Literary Guild in 1949. Although she now lives in California, for many years she lived in Denver. Like Mary Hallock Foote's sentimental fiction, The Golden Fury is a story of romance, yet it is realistic and, like Miss Gardiner's story, has overtones of the well-known tales of Maggie Brown and Baby Doe Tabor.

The story opens as the Lawler family struggles in the "Gospel Wagon" to get over the pass and down into Leadville. It is a most effective description of the difficult entrance to Leadville. The prospectors, eager to get ahead, ignore the stalled wagon. The heroine Caroline is only six in this scene, so the new land is seen through the puzzled eyes of a child.

Timber line! The carriage entered a high, barren, breathless region of boulders and of rills trickling down from under the edges of snow patches. The husks of foot-high mountain sunflowers which had bloomed in August rattled in the wind. A thick moss studded with minute dried flowers hugged the ground like fur.

Caroline's ears popped and felt thick. She peered out and drew in a breath that was like the blade of winter piercing her skinny chest.

When it seemed that the four horses could not strain another foot, the grade leveled off, and they drew up on a flat, rock-strewn crest of the ridge. Back of them to the east lay the vast, shimmering, opalescent basin of South Park. Ahead of them to the west lay the sharper, narrower valley of the Arkansas river, backed by the jagged majesty of the Sawatch range.⁶²

Finally over the grueling pass, the Lawler family enters Leadville:

There was something in the air...It was filled with a queer, acid, nose-tickling smell--in time, it would seem only natural to live in a town where the smelter fumes killed the trees and blighted the wild flowers...But now the smell was strange and exciting.

The starry night was punctuated by blasts of flame from the smelter...Suddenly Leadville lay before them, ablaze with kerosene flares and torches and lamps backed by reflectors. Night in Leadville was far livelier than day...A dozen bands blared through open doorways...freight wagons standing every which way with the bare ribs arching over them, saddled horses drooping hipshot beside the hitching racks, strings of burros with dainty hoofs and huge packs picking their way around the stumps that still protruded from the streets...Great tents bore the painted announcement, "Lodgings from 50¢ to \$1.50." (pp. 16-17)

In Leadville, Caroline grows up under the shadow of her preacher father. When she is a teenager, he discovers her plan to go to an Assembly Ball and drags her into the street to shame her before his soap box crowd. She runs to a brothel, where she often delivered washing, and with one of the girls flees to Aspen. There she marries a weak wealthy man who soon leaves her with a child. With Floss, her friend from Leadville, she goes to Cripple Creek and establishes a successful bakery. She marries Pete Ramsey, a lazy teamster and gains a little capital from her store and a mine. After Pete's death, she goes to Denver to set her daughter up in society. Of course, her first husband is there, but she refuses his advances, realizing finally that she does not want him. Thea, her daughter, rejects society and, in the grandest irony of the story, falls in love with a respectable minister. They

⁶² Marian Castle, The Golden Fury, p. 7. Subsequent references refer to this edition.

end up poor but happy.

Although the story covers too much of Colorado, it still is a fairly successful tale. Caroline is a sensible, realistic character. Her career echoes only faintly the wild attempts of Molly Brown to "crash" Denver society. The details of setting do not intrude on the reader's sense of narrative development as they do in Waters' story. The places and people seem real, not obvious inventions or imitations as in Miss Gardiner's story. Evidently the most popular of the books discussed, it is easy to see why. The story moves at a good pace, and at no time do the events seem impossible. Although the story only opens in Leadville, the flavor of that mining camp colors the entire chain of events.

The final novel is by William MacLeod Raine, Colorado's most popular fiction writer. As a young man, he moved to Denver for his health and began his writing for the Denver papers. The clipped, journalistic style is evident in his fiction. In his most productive years he averaged two novels a year. Over twenty of them have been filmed. Except for some of his earliest books, romantic English histories, all are classics of the genre, "Western."

Leadville appears in several of Raine's novels, but the one to be discussed here is Gloxy Hole. The story is a standard one. We have encountered pieces of it already in dime novels, Mary Hallock Foote, and other twentieth century writers. As the dime novelists, Raine is most interested in plot, but he takes time to establish his character and an accurate setting. The plot centers on Henry Page, an Easterner who has staked a claim and shot Ben Vining whose gang jumped his claim in the night. The dead man was a powerful force in the town, but Page refuses to run and the sheriff Downing must protect him. Into this plot which we recognize from The Led-Horse Claim and the crime stories of the dime novels, Raine introduces two young ladies.

Erma Roberts is an actress and, therefore, just a notch above a prostitute. The other is Joan Regal who is searching for her brother, as Milly supposedly was in The Last Assembly Ball. She has much in common with the Eastern heroine we met in nineteenth century stories, but she has some twentieth century independence and Western initiative. The sheriff must contend with the marshal who seems to be a borderline ruffian like Marshall Mart Duggan Willison describes. Jesse James appears on the edge of town as he actually did, although he does not enter into the action of the story. There is a gambler, Cape Wallace, who is just slightly better than a criminal, who befriends Erma and falls in love with Joan from afar.

Page is cleared of his murder charge but refuses to leave Leadville. He turns out to be a weak man, unlike the nineteenth century Eastern hero. He compromises Joan's reputation, promises to marry her, then deserts her for "society." Meanwhile, the Vining gang plots revenge on Henry Page. They have found Joan's brother, who is wanted for robbery, and trick him into accosting Henry at one of the Assembly Balls. Henry is killed and Jim escapes. The Vinings double cross Jim, but his story is believed by Wallace and Downing, and the villains are forced out of Leadville. Jim is killed and Joan blames herself for his death and Henry's. Although Cape Wallace proposes to Joan, she insists on returning to the East. In Denver, the Vining gang attacks Wallace as he meets with Joan. He refuses treatment for his wound, forcing Joan to accept his proposal. The Vinings are finally arrested and all is once again peaceful.

Raine uses the most exciting elements of the nineteenth century mining camp fiction--the emphasis on crime and outlaws, the fainting heroine, the quarrels that originate on mining claims, and adds the dance hall girls, the gamblers, the stage people that made Leadville people exciting. He discards

the impossible disguises and other gimmicks, the awkward plot manipulations, the sadistic or sensual details. In short, his Westerns are straightforward reading that appeal to the twentieth century audience that would be comparable to the dime novel audience of the last century. The sentimental twentieth century audience would more likely turn to Marian Castle.

Like the dime novels, Raine's details of Leadville setting are worked into the plot. There are no long descriptions as in The Golden Fury or Wild Earth's Nobility. The details are accurate--from Jesse James to the Assembly Balls. Tabor is brought directly into the plot rather than merely mentioned as a shadowy figure, an example of "what might have been." The sheriff asks Tabor to help organize the townspeople against the Vining gang. Tabor promises some help but reminds Downing of his political situation, unstable at best as he is trying for the Senate.

Raine includes as much of the West as he can. When Wallace and Downing search a cabin looking for Jim Regal, they find copies of the Police Gazette and two Deadwood Dick dime novels. He doesn't miss many details that would make his story seem authentic. William MacLeod Raine deserves the fame he has as one of the best writers of "mass Westerns."

The Town and Its Fiction: An Evaluation

It remains now to evaluate the uses these authors made of Leadville and the lasting value of the fiction they created. Leadville experienced worldwide fame. Famous people traveled to the "Magic City"--among them Ulysses S. Grant and Oscar Wilde. Newspapers all over the United States carried stories of these visits and of the crimes that were sometimes spectacular enough for the yellow journalists, so an author could easily pick up names of famous

Leadville places--the Windsor, the Clarendon, Pap Wyman's. Society news spreads rapidly from one society to another, so a dime novelist like Manning and a historical realist like Marian Castle could know about the Assembly Balls, even if they did not read Mary Hallock Foote.

Details of the setting a native could correct evade the writers who never visited Colorado. A fault of the dime novelists, especially, was the habit of changing the Leadville terrain to suit their purposes. Actually, Leadville is on a high, flat, barren plain, almost at timberline. The miners early stripped the hills of any scraggly trees left from years of persistent cold winds. It would have been hard for Deadwood Dick to find a grove of aspen, much less hemlock, to hide in. On the other hand, Wild Dick Turpin could not have approached the town by hiding among the rocks. There weren't any that big for miles. The dime novelists ignore the mountains around Leadville. Mount Elbert, practically in Leadville's lap, is Colorado's highest peak and deserves mention. Marian Castle, Raine, and Mary Hallock Foote seem much more aware of Leadville's beauty and isolation than the dime novelists are. We have already commented upon the fantastic ride that Badger sends King-Pin Sport on, to Denver and back within twenty-four hours, when Marian Castle describes in detail the struggle of wagons, horses and riders just to get over the final steep and narrow pass.

Mary Hallock Foote is the only novelist to use the mines accurately in her writing. A mining dispute is the basis for The Led-Horse Claim. Her frightening description of the dark, the loneliness, is a striking contrast to Wheeler's inaccurate description of the mines as warm and light. Mrs. Foote spoke from personal experience and this, coupled with her imagination, produced a fine description.

Frank Waters' extensive research for his book on Stratton is reflected in his masses of details in Wild Earth's Nobility--production figures, profits, losses, various areas of mining in Colorado. Rogier invests in the mines and Waters carefully traces his scientific methods and the problems with machinery, men and money that finally brought his downfall. Waters is not so clear about the basic details of mining, however, as Helen Hunt Jackson is in her children's story, Nelly's Silver Mine. Because she was writing for an audience that had no idea what a mine looked like, she carefully explained each detail of search, discovery and mining. In many ways, her little story was much more effective than Waters' attempt to say everything about mining, or Mrs. Foote's story that was not really centered in the mines but in the love story complicated by rival claims.

Like Mary Hallock Foote, William MacLeod Raine starts his plot with a mine dispute, but he soon moves on to the problems of law enforcement. Dorothy Gardiner and Marian Castle do not discuss the actual mines but both of their heroines marry the wrong man because of the happiness they think mining wealth will bring. The dime novelist Badger's outlaws use an abandoned mine as a hideout, but there is no feeling it is a real mine but merely a handy series of tunnels and escape routes.

There are several reasons for this lack of exploitation of the mines as scenes for fiction. First of all, only Mary Hallock Foote had been in the mines and others, wanting some authentic flavor, didn't risk writing of something technical they knew nothing about. There is also a lack of sufficient plot situations that could take place in the mines themselves. Even Mrs. Foote had to set up a contrived situation to go into the mines. Mrs. Denny wanted to look at them, and even then the incident ended in a sentimental meeting underground between the two lovers. The action in Leadville fiction

is largely above ground, where the crime and the shooting and the love and the wealth flourished, more exciting results of the methodical mining.

That several writers should not include the mines at all while setting their stories in Leadville is also understandable. Even above ground, mining can become trite in a plot. When one love story of the poor girl married to the wealthy miner has been told, there is little another writer can do with the plot, especially when someone as glamorous as Baby Doe Tabor has already outdone any fiction-writer's wildest fancy. When one story of claim-jumping has been told, other writers can only introduce variations. Mining finances as Waters handles them belong in non-fiction. In Dorothy Gardiner's and Marian Castle's stories, speculation is only the cause of further unhappiness for the lovers. Dime novelist Badger only uses the discovered gold mine as an excuse for a plot centered on the diabolical Masked Chief and heroic King-Pin Sport.

Leadville's fame rested not only on the fabulous mines or the famous events that made national headlines, but also on crime brought by those who were determined to take advantage of the uncontrolled boom. Dime novelists capitalized on this aspect of famous Leadville first. William MacLeod Raine followed their lead, added more accurate details and introduced variations into the plot based upon real Leadville people and places.

Mary Hallock Foote is the only author who evidently played down the violence in Leadville. The underground battle in the Led-Horse mine involves two men on one side, five on the other. According to Willison, the battle between Stevens, Leiter, and Williams involved many more (cf. p. 6 of this text). Mrs. Foote is accurate, however, in portraying the ineffectiveness of the courts in solving claim disputes. Her contemporaries based their stories on some facts, then expanded them as their stories demanded. Wild

Dick Turpin is a road agent, a common phenomenon around Leadville. Manning was building on an actual situation when ^{he} created Turpin's outlaw band, and most of his details of the lawlessness of the town, the lynching attempt, the "fixed" court are actual fact, if exaggerated. But pure fabrication is his idea of outlaw and sheriff trading places.

Deadwood Dick's disguises as a pawnbroker in peaceful Leadville is unbelievable, but Wheeler may have been giving a fairly accurate account of Leadville in 1889. Gambling was decreasing both because the gamblers were forced out of the city and because the boom was fading and many of the rougher elements were drifting to more lively camps. If Wheeler got his information from reading and travelers, this Deadwood Dick novel of 1889 reflects the calmer situation of a stable if less successful town. The motivation for the whole plot, however, is the robbery-murder of the Cohens, but this element was one of the first to be brought under control. In this detail, Wheeler seemed to have erred.

Most inaccurate of all stories of crime in Leadville is Badger's detective tale. There is no mention of any Leadville landmarks, the inaccurate distances have already been discussed, the mines are merely labyrinths of secret tunnels, and the plot is based on King-Pin Sport's search for a sadistic villain. No sheriff, no road agents, no gamblers, no citizens, take part in the story; it exploits Leadville's reputation only.

William MacLeod Raine most effectively pictures the Leadville crime scene. Henry Page murdered in self-defense, protecting his claim against jumpers. The courts cleared him but only after the sheriff's efforts with Tabor, the newspapers and the lying witnesses. The court room scenes are much more realistic than those of Manning in Wild Dick Turpin and Mary Hall-ock Foote gives no legal explanations for the maneuverings in The Led-Horse

Claim. From this base, Raine builds his love story. The characters seem to be plausible Leadville citizens. The marshall was evidently based on Mart Duggan. The other characters--the gambler, the actress, the distressed Eastern girl, and an ineffective Eastern hero--fit easily into the Leadville setting which Raine sprinkles with actual places and people. The lynching attempt, the gun battles, are neither underwritten nor overplayed if compared with accounts of the "real" Leadville.

Each writer used the Leadville setting only if it added to his story. If the setting was unfamiliar or would only detract from the more important plot, then it was ignored or changed at the author's discretion. If one is searching for authentic Colorado local color, it will not be found in satisfactory balance. Mary Hallock Foote writes realistically from personal experience, but her stories are not wholly satisfactory as local color since her plots are sentimental Eastern inventions. The dime novelists ignore the local element and concentrate on the colorful plot, until the "local" color balance is destroyed. The twentieth century writers lived in Colorado and knew the mountains, but they wrote not from first hand experience but from books, from stories, from times remembered, not experienced.

For this reason, fiction set in Leadville fails on the whole to be a satisfactory representation of the real town of Leadville. But inaccuracy of setting is not the only factor in the failure of these novels. The sentimentalism is trite. We do not admire Mary Hallock Foote for writing Led-Horse Claim according to a formula. Although The Last Assembly Ball escapes from some of the sentimental formula, she evidently wrote the novel as a warning of the dangers of love and marriage in the West, and this moralizing hurts the novel. The fabricated ending seems weak, the motivation is not clearly developed. The sentimental vein still governs her plots and purposes.

No better is the sensationalism of the dime novels that clouds any realistic portrayal of Leadville. Writing for money, of a place they had never seen, it is understandable that these men failed to give their Eastern readers any real idea of the West or its people. In the twentieth century, Thomas Hornsby Ferril contends that western fiction too often portrays an unrealistic superman, corrupted into caricature:

"...we must have the typical villain, the typical dance hall girl, the typical preacher, the typical sheriff, and all the ridiculous stereotyped creatures who must play typical cowboy-and-Indian and typical cops-and-robbers against the typical backdrop of typical landscape.⁶³

But the sources of fiction are still buried in the mountains, if authors can only find them and not be tempted to imitate the real, follow the formula, or include everything in one grand attempt. Perhaps a writer still may fulfill Mary Hallock Foote's prophecy in The Last Assembly Ball:

The West is not to be measured by homesick tales from an Eastern point of view. The true note will be struck when the alien touch no longer blunts the chord, groping for futile harmonies, through morbid minor strains; when we have our novelists of the Pacific slope, cosmopolite by blood, acclimated through more than one generation to the heady air of the plains, bred in the traditions of an older civilization--or, better still, with a wild note as frank as that which comes to us from the sad northern steppe. (p. 8)

⁶³ Thomas Hornsby Ferril, "The Challenge of the Pioneer Spirit," Colorado Quarterly, (Winter, 1957), p. 238.

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FACT VS. FICTION:
LEADVILLE, COLORADO, AS A SETTING FOR FICTION

by

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FACT VS. FICTION:
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Leadville, Colorado, a silver and gold mining town high in the Rocky Mountains, had its biggest boom in the early 1880's. It was the home of H. A. W. Tabor and his second wife, Baby Doe, who froze to death guarding their worthless mine, following her husband's dying wish. Maggie Brown lived here until she went to Denver to storm society. On the Titanic, she was a heroine. Both of these stories live in books and movies. The town's fame made it readily available to authors and their audiences. Earliest Leadville writer was Mary Hallock Foote who lived in the town and wrote love stories, according to the sentimental tradition, but occasionally added some local scenes in the mines, at the society balls. The dime novelists exploited the town's famous name and reputation for crime. Sensationalism abounded in the stories of William Manning, E. L. Wheeler, and Joseph E. Badger, with titles like Deadwood Dick's Leadville Lay; or, Bristol and Bucket's Boom.

Writers in the twentieth century echo these early works of fiction, and the stories of Molly and Baby Doe. Romance is the center of stories by Dorothy Gardiner and Marian Castle. Their heroines only pass through Leadville. Frank Waters touches on Leadville in his attempt at a Colorado epic. The crime scene is again used by William MacLeod Raine. He combines the love, action, and crime elements of nineteenth and twentieth century writers into a fast-moving story.

Accuracy was not important to some of the dime novelists. They read about Leadville or listened to travelers' tales. They changed the terrain to suit their purposes. They ignored the mines. Only Foote included a scene inside the mines. Others did not know the mines, or found little reason in their stories to go into the mines. The crime scene is most often exploited.

Only Foote plays it down. The dime novelists largely imagined it. Raine supports his fiction with actual people and events in Leadville.

The lasting value of this literature is questionable. The nineteenth century writers followed formulas--sentimentalism or sensationalism. The twentieth century authors copy fact and still follow formulas, or they try to include every aspect of pioneer life. Maybe someone yet will write lasting literature that will make Colorado's mining camps as memorable as those of Bret Harte and Mark Twain.